A West Pointer's Book

IN these times every well read American is bound to know something about strategy and tactics; and, now that we are putting an army of millions into the field something about the means of educating the officers who are to command them. On these subjects Major-Gen. Greene's little book on *Our First Year in the Great War* is full of valuable information more readily accessible than anywhere else.

The author represents the best type of American Regular Army officer educated at the West Point Military Academy. As the military attache of the United States assigned to our legation in Russia he witnessed the great battles in the war between Russia and Turkey in 1877-78, when he was Captain of Engineers. Later he served as a general officer in Cuba in the Spanish-American war; and altogether his attainments, experience and tastes have admirably fitted him to be a military critic.

Much confusion of thought prevails in discussion concerning the present war in the use of the term strategy and tactics. Every one knows that it is a compliment to say of a General that he is a great strategist or an able tactician, but many persons who speak thus would be puzzled if called upon to explain precisely what they mean. Gen. Greene puts the matter in a nutshell:

"Strategy is the art of bringing troops to the field of battle in such manner that at the point where the decision is to be made there shall be a superiority of numbers; or, as the artillery corporal told his instructor at Fort Monroe years ago, 'Stratagee is how to get there fustest with the mostest men.' Tactics is the art of handling troops in battle."

We have heard the definition of strategy which Gen. Greene assigns to the artillery corporal often attributed to Gen. Forrest, the famous Confederate cavalry leader, whose English was unique and whose written report of the capture of Fort Pillow read: "We busted the fort at niner clock and scatered the niggers. The men is still cillanern [killing them] in the woods."

Strategy, or the art of bringing troops to the battlefield in superior numbers, being dependent upon the topography of the country which is the scene of war—the lay of the land, so to speak—the principles do not change with time, but remain to-day the same as they were in the days of Julius Cæsar or Napoleon. Tactics, on the other hand, are dependent upon the arms of combat, which are ever changing. "Consequently tactics are never the same in any two succeeding wars. The greatest master of the art, Napoleon, laid down in his maxims that the tactical drill book should be changed at least once in every five years in order to keep pace with new inventions in weapons."

The tactics of three arms, infantry, cavalry and artillery, which prevailed in the Napoleonic wars, have now given place to the tactics of five arms, engineers and aviation having been added to the former three. The cavalry, formerly known as the eyes of the army, have been replaced by the airmen in searching out the positions of the enemy; and "the engineers have come into the front rank as fighting men, laying out thousands of miles of trenches under the hottest of fire from bullets, shells, gas, aerial bombs and hand grenades; and under direction of the engineers the infantry have become trench diggers and concrete manufacturers on a scale and with an elaboration never dreamed of by the wildest prophets and the most vivid imaginations five years ago."

In former wars the employment of cavalry to pursue and harass a retreating foe or to protect a rear guard and thereby prevent an orderly retreat from being turned into a rout, was an important and familiar feature of tactics; but there has been little opportunity for this in the present struggle. Gen. Greene says that the Allies have ceased buying horses in America except such as are purchased for draught purposes; and motors have been found to be generally preferable to these where there is a sufficient supply of gasolene to furnish the power and of rubber for the wheel tires. The machine gun is also a novel element in tactics, enabling, as it sometimes does, a few men to do the destructive work which formerly required a battalion or regiment.

The extraordinary military ability of Washington and his experience in the revolution impressed him deeply with the necessity of making some provison for the instruction of American officers in the science and art of war. In his advocacy of the establishment of a well disciplined army for purposes of national defence he was zealously aided by Alexander Hamilton. "Their ideas bore fruit (curiously enough when Jefferson was President) in the establishment of a military academy at West Point." It was a sickly child, says Gen. Greene, from the date of its foundation in 1802 until 1817, when President Monroe appointed as its superintendent Silvanus Thayer, "who saved the military art from becoming a lost art in this country." He was a scientific officer with a genius for organization, who had been sent to Europe by President Madison to spend two years in studying fortifications and the battlefields on which Napoleon had won his victories. "Within four years, by the sheer force of his own will, his ripe scholarship and his extensive knowledge of military affairs, he had produced the Military Academy as it has existed without fundamental or vital change for nearly 100 years."

To be classed with Silvanus Thayer as one of the makers of West Point is Dennis H. Mahan, who was a cadet there during Thayer's superintendency and who became professor of civil and military engineering in the academy in 1832. "With but few exceptions all the soldiers who gained distinction in the Mexican, civil, Spanish and Indian wars were pupils of Mahan," and from him and his numerous books they learned more basic principles of strategy and tactics to which we have referred. "He was the able father of a distinguished son—Capt. Alfred T. Mahan of the navy, whose books on the influence of sea power affected the subsequent development of all the great navies of the world.

All the numerous schools of instruction for officers which the enlargement of our army has made necessary must be based more or less on the West Point system, and the more nearly they approach it the more likely it is that the country will have cause to be proud of their product.

Every one who reads Gen. Greene's little book will be able to talk about the war more intelligently than he did before.

OUR FIRST YEAR IN THE GREAT WAR. By Major-General Francis Vinton Greene, U. S. V. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Fifty-odd verses describing episodes of childhood in the manner of the Stevenson rhymes compose a book called *Jane, Joseph and John: Their Book of Verses*, by Ralph Bergengren, to come from the Atlantic Monthly Press. The author's dexterity may be gathered from his *Dedication:*

"To Children
Who may some day look
The pages through
Of this, their Book,
I dedicate it.

"And, even more,
To just a Few
Who came before
This Book was new,
And antedate it.

"And One or Two
Who always will,
Though years accrue,
Be children still,
And helped create it."

It is announced that the author of *A War Nurse's Diary*, published by the Macmillan Company, is Miss Minnie E. Clark, who is still at the front.

"The Void of War"

By EDWARD N. TEALL.

AUTHORS reveal themselves in the titles they devise for their books. Reginald Farrer called his report of a botanical exploration in Tibet *On the Eaves of the World*, and now he names his war book, a collection of "impressions" experienced in journeyings up and down the western front, *The Void of War*. The former title was deliberately delimiting, for he reached only the eaves, not the Himalayan ridegpole of the world. And the latter title is exactly descriptive of content and definite of periphery, for in the book he concerns himself not with battles but with battlegrounds—and with these only after the war tide has passed. He reports human phenomena as surprisingly and "convincingly" as he does those of the plant and flower life of strange, remote lands.

Is his self-proclaimed constant endeavor to avoid "forged impressions" in some degree a confession of weakness? No mere human mind, searching itself in the solemn presence of the battlegrounds of the World War in Defence of Civilization could possibly restrict itself to purely objective operations. The angelic mind would be, in contemplation of the wreckage, tortured into something like satanic hatred for the hand of the Hun that had launched the work of desolation and destruction, and the diabolical mind might be soothed to an almost heavenly serenity on surveying so complete a realization of its dearest dream of ruin. Could Deity itself, in any form wherein mankind's varied processes of conception have clothed it, be certain of an absolutely honest, unimpassioned view? Absolute honesty is Mr. Farrer's high desire, expressed in his abhorrence of the forged impression. The more completely he might conquer and obliterate his prejudices, the less we should respect the result. But it adds a special piquancy to his text to see him striving, openly and conscientiously, to rid his panorama of trenches of all blemish of decorative personality.

This is a tantalizingly "quotable" book. Imagine, please, the inverted commas on the remainder of this paragraph, bits wrenched loose here and there: Another thing that gets hold of me from the first is the ironical tranquillity of the country. Humanity has an old ancestral horror of everything that moves otherwise than on feet or wheels. [Hence the fearfulness of the tanks]. there is no more sanctity attaching to the houses of the Grand Place per se [in Arras] than to any other houses of men; but they were a living tradition. A New England . . . of a grandeur that defies advertisement and transcends rhetoric. The average Englishman saw the "scrap of paper" not as a mere outrage of strong or weak, but as the very definite and deliberate denial of all the codes and conventions of honor laboriously compiled by Europe through centuries of civilization. Not a war of dynasties or interests, but of ideas; a crusade of peoples.

Continue to supply the marks of quotation. I am dazed and stupid with the sheer revelation: A ghastly, homely heroism. The face of Europe as it was before the dawn of humanity. Machines are the essential warriors, with science for their seven senses. [But] a curious climax to our immeasurable elaborations of machinery: the ultimate source of victory is man, and man alone. [Defined as] man's intelligent sense of himself as an individual, merged in the sense of himself as part of a big whole, I believe that for the first time in history we are on the edge of a real democracy.

Just once more: The butte [at Pozieres] is grim and dreadful in its air of catastrophe gone cold. It is like a dead face frozen stiff in horror. The top of it is a bare, bald white calvary—but the crosses are a bathos. As you sit there it is almost literally as if you could hear the drumming of a heart, the pulses of a Buddha booming up toward his birth. I feel the presence here of so gigantic a heroic uplift of mankind that the aspiration, the glory of it, cannot much longer be banked down. Amiens—the very apex of Boche Kultur. The blackest of all debts we owe the Boche is that he has forced the whole world to compete with him in a steady crescendo of horrors.

All this is from Part I., "The Heart of England"—where the author's heart is. Part II., "The Face of France," and Part III., "The Call of Italy," are more hurried, more superficial, less arousing than their predecessor. In France Farrer did not see such hideous wreckage as in Flanders; but the country gave at first a growing impression—*only* an impression, based on the physical appearance of the land, not the behavior of the people—of tiredness. But the pain of it grew as he "saw the murder of the land quite naked, without the veil of English glamour or the sense of English responsibility." He says: "France may challenge admiration, but I rather feel that she defies affection." And again: "Tired, dour and difficult in pride as France may sometimes be, she certainly has the secret of an inexhaustible magnificence." Without surrendering his convictions, the Briton renders a generously measured justice.

In October, 1917, Mr. Farrer wrote of Italy: "You certainly never saw a finer and more determined army; and what they have done is only the earnest of yet more to come."

These "letters from three fronts" are different from anything else we have seen about the war. We have histories of its campaigns, political and military. We have accounts of personal experiences. We have tons of propaganda, good and bad. We have collections of documents. But here we have a broad, sweeping view of the whole thing as it affects, not nations nor individuals, but the human race—a cosmic view.

THE VOID OF WAR. By Reginald Farrer. Houghton Mifflin Company. $2.